

KCTCS and OCTE: Building Partnerships One School at a Time

Billie Jean Cole, associate dean of student affairs at Big Sandy Community and Technical College (BSCTC), and Keithen McKenzie, BSCTC associate dean of academic affairs with technical programs, often go to the Belfry Area Technology Center (ATC) to discuss postsecondary options with students and how to make a smooth transition into the community college system.

Cole said having a working relationship with ATCs and career and technical centers (CTC) is important.

“If our students are going to have the opportunities that we want them to have in the state of Kentucky, this partnership is vital,” she said. “It’s important to have a dialogue with the principals weekly or monthly so we are working to have all the opportunities in place for the students.”

Faculty from BSCTC often visit their counterparts at the ATCs and CTCs, as well to share information in making sure the transition from high school to college is seamless, Cole added.

McKenzie said the relationship between the college and the high school career and tech centers serves as a stepping stone for students transitioning to the postsecondary level, and high school programs are a great foundation for moving on to advanced studies at the college level. He also said that ATCs or CTCs often will have articulation agreements with the college.

“With the electricity program at Belfry, we have an articulation agreement for their students so when they take certain classes, they can take that into the community college and get credit for it,” he said. “They don’t have to retake the classes, and that gives them a head start in their higher education. They can move on and get their degrees a lot faster and get into the workforce and get a good job.”

McKenzie added that students can learn to do something they want to do and have marketable skills because of the opportunities available and the many different programs offered at both the high school and college levels.

Belfry ATC Principal Annette Harris said her main focus as an administrator is to have every student educationally prepared for the next level of school or in the workforce.



Billie Jean Cole, right, associate dean of student affairs at Big Sandy Community and Technical College, discussed opportunities with Belfry ATC students on a recent school visit.

“Our relationship with BSCTC has flourished in the last few years. We have common goals, high expectations and we set priorities for students and their educational progress,” she said. “This relationship, with all the expectations of college- and career-readiness goals, is even more vital at this time than it has been in the past.”

Harris added that one of the most rewarding parts of her job is to have a student come back after going on to BSCTC or into a successful career and having done so as a result of what they learned at the school.

Justin Williamson has been enrolled in the Belfry ATC’s carpentry program for three years and plans to attend BSCTC.

“I would like to go to BSCTC for two years and then maybe transfer to a university,” he said. “I might get into HVAC or stay with carpentry. I’m not sure at this point.”

Williamson, like so many CTE students, will leave high school with choices and a sense of what the workforce is like because of the education he has received. Many of Belfry’s students are attending the various BSCTC campuses.

Nick West and Payton Mullins are enrolled in the electricity program at BSCTC’s Pikeville campus and say the experience they had at Belfry better prepared them for college.

“I want to be an electrician in the coal mines, and I took the electricity program at Belfry ATC and it helped me come to the next level,” West said. “It prepared me and gave me the basics I needed here at BSCTC.”



Nick West, center, and Payton Mullins, right, are both former Belfry ATC students enrolled in the in the electricity program at BSCTC’s Pikeville campus. Here they worked with a fellow student on a classroom project.

Mullins passed his certification exam in carpentry at the ATC and saw a need to learn more about electricity after becoming involved in home remodeling.

“My plans are to get my degree in electrical wiring at BSCTC and go into commercial wiring as a profession,” he said.

Instructors at BSCTC also see the advantages students have by beginning in CTE programs offered at the secondary level.

Joe Compton is a teacher in the BSCTC electricity and electronics department. He said the school has a close relationship with the ATCs and CTCs in the area.

“When those students come to this program, they actually know quite a lot and are not just starting out,” he said. “I find those students are really ready to go into the labs more so than

someone just off the street. It's amazing and, in fact, what we normally do is team students without a background with the ones that come here from the ATCs or CTCs to kind of mentor them, and they do a wonderful job. I find that it's an outstanding relationship we share with the instructors at the area technical centers. ”

John Maynard, another electricity and electronics teacher at BSCTC, said high school students who have a CTE background are well-prepared when they make it to college.

“The people that have been there have a little bit of experience. They are good at completing the program and attending class. They're just really good students,” he said.

In today's educational environment, partnerships between the secondary and postsecondary sectors are vital in advancing students from one level to another. The Office of Career and Technical Education and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) are using their partnership to better prepare students for the workplace.

The relationship between the Belfry ATC and BSCTC is a prime example of what success can be achieved when the two educational entities work together, said Cole.

“The partnership between Belfry ATC and BSCTC is successful because we are first and foremost concerned about the well-being of our students,” she added. “We instill in students that the training and education they receive makes them marketable and employable in today's workforce. We're creating legacies.”